

# Doctrine of Karma: A Humanitarian Perspective

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| Article Detail:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Abstract                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
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| <p>Received: 03 Sep 2025;<br/>Received in revised form: 01 Oct 2025;<br/>Accepted: 04 Oct 2025;<br/>Available online: 08 Oct 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/</a>).</p> <p><b>Keywords—</b> Karma, Humanitarian Perspective, Duty, Ethics, Perseverance.</p> | <p>The doctrine of Karma has remained a central theme in Indian philosophy, spirituality, and ethics, while its universal relevance is echoed across global traditions. The principle asserts that human destiny is shaped by one's own actions rather than external forces. Classical texts such as the Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, and Vaivarta Purana, as well as the teachings of saints like Tulsidas, Vasavanna, and Swami Vivekananda highlight that sincere effort, diligence, and righteous conduct are essential for meaningful living. Similar concepts are also found in the Bible: "As you sow, so shall you reap". From a humanitarian perspective, the Doctrine of Karma emphasizes individual responsibility, perseverance, and moral accountability. This paper explores the humanitarian interpretation of Karma, connecting ancient wisdom with contemporary values, and advocates for continuous effort (Charaiveti Charaiveti), balanced mind, and selfless action (Nishkama Karma) as guiding principles for social and personal well-being.</p> |

## I. INTRODUCTION

Karma, derived from the Sanskrit root "kri" meaning "to do," signifies action and its inevitable consequences. The idea that "Man is born according to his past thoughts and actions and his body is a part of his karma" (Mahabharata, *Scenes from the Mahabharat*) reflects the deep-rooted belief that human life is governed by one's deeds (Nayak 201). The Bible reinforces the same principle: "As you sow, so shall you reap" (Galatians 6:7) (Watson). Similarly, the Vaivarta Purana declares: "Avaśyameva bhoktavyam kṛtaṁ karma śubhāśubham", while the Mahabharata affirms: "Sarve karmavashaa vayam".

Thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, and poets such as Goswami Tulsidas and Vasavanna

emphasized Karma as the foundation of progress and ethical living. Tulsidas asserts, "Karma pradhan vishwa kari rakha", and in modern times the slogan "Shramev Jayate" carries the same message. The Bhagavad Gita further elaborates the doctrine through *Karmayoga*, where Krishna teaches: "Karmanye vādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana" (BG 2.47) – highlighting human responsibility for action, not for its fruits.

The humanitarian perspective of Karma shifts the focus from fatalism and destiny to accountability, discipline, and perseverance. This paper examines how the philosophy of Karma can be interpreted as a guide for purposeful and ethical human life.

## Objectives of the Study:

The present study is undertaken with the following objectives:

- ❖ To analyze the doctrine of Karma from a humanitarian perspective.
- ❖ To highlight the role of Karma in shaping individual destiny through responsibility, duty, and perseverance.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study follows a qualitative and interpretative approach, relying on textual analysis of primary scriptures (Mahabharata, Bhagavad Gita, Vaivarta Purana, Tulsidas, Vasavanna, Bible) and secondary sources (commentaries, scholarly articles, and interpretations). The research employs comparative analysis to draw parallels between Indian philosophical traditions and Western ethical thought. By synthesizing scriptural references, literary sources (e.g., Shakespeare, Chaucer), and humanitarian viewpoints, the study attempts to reinterpret the doctrine of Karma in a way that is practical, ethical, and universally relevant for contemporary society.

### Humanitarian Perspective and Contemporary Relevance of Karma:

In my high school text book I read a lesson, 'Scenes from the Mahabharat'. An unforgettable sentence of the lesson says, "Man is born according to his past thoughts and actions and his body is a part of his karma".

The Bible says, "As you sow, so shall you reap" meaning there by that our actions today will have consequences in the future. Vaivarta Purana says, "Avaśyameva bhoktavyam kṛtam karma śubhāśubham". The Anushashan Parva in the Mahabharata says, "Sarve karmavashaa vayam". Vasavanna, a famous Kannad poet, saint and social reformer and Swami Vivekanand as well as M.K. Gandhi believed in the principle "work is worship". Goswami Tulsidass says, "Karma Pradhan Vishwa kari raakha". We have a prevalent slogan in the present times, "Shramew Jayate". The import of all these references is that our health, our success, our power and all the true happiness of our life lies in our duty done. By sincere and honest efforts, by perseverance

and diligence we can rise to higher and higher apex. We must keep going on like the mountain brook flowing incessantly making its way through rocks and thickets until it mingles with the boundless sea and becomes a part of the infinite.

We rise and fall owing to our own doings. Only we are responsible for making or marring our future. It is no use finding fault with others. We ourselves spoil our career and put the blame on Time, God, and Destiny. As Tulsidas says, "Kaalahi karmahi Ishwarahi mithya dosh lagaay". Every action has its reaction; equal efforts equal effect. Sometimes, however we do not get appropriate, adequate and expected result of our endeavor. There may be multiple factors responsible for it. Sometimes the attempt may have been made half-heartedly, sometimes in the wrong way or direction, as Tulsidas says, "Usar barsahi trina nahi jaamaa". Keep in mind that mere ambition cannot make us successful, we must put heart and soul together for any achievement.

Hitopadesh says - "*udyamena hi sidhyanti kāryāṇi na manorathaiḥ; nahi suptasya śimhasya praviśanti mukhe mṛgāḥ*" (www.wisdomlib.org). A student has in his hand to burn midnight candle for success, a teacher can only try to give his best to his pupils to convince them from ignorance, a doctor can try his level best to help the patient get rid of his/her ailment, a former can only work hard in his field for good crop, a soldier can only fight bravely and honestly for victory. Nevertheless, the result is sometimes surprisingly adverse. All the same, we must always try to rise up and try again with new zeal. That is why Lord Krishna, the innovator of Karmayoga says in 47<sup>th</sup> shloka of chapter two of Shrimadbhavadgita - "karmaṇyevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana" (Swami 102). Thus, we do have power to do our duty but we do not have any power over the result.

So, try my friends, to keep working with calm and balanced mind. Don't ever lose temper, since fury steal away equilibrium of brain. As a result, we get confused and are unable to use foresight. The Geeta says in 63<sup>rd</sup> shloka of chapter two, "*krodhān bhavati sammohaḥ sammohāt smṛiti-vibhramah / smṛiti-bhranśhād buddhi-*

*nāśho buddhi-nāśhāt praṇaśhyati*" (Mukundananda). Don't bray and brag on your achievements. Work hard in silence and let success make the sound. We cannot rest a moment without doing something or the other. So, why not always try to do something positive. All beings are slave to Nature and Nature compels everyone to keep doing so. "Charaiveti charaiveti" says the Aitreya Brahman; otherwise, idle mind will produce negative thoughts resulting in negative actions. "An idle mind is devil's workshop", says the Bible. So, "*vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumānśh charati niḥsprihaḥ*" - The Geeta in Verse 71 of Chapter 2 (Bansal 379) - we must do our duty without ambition, attachment and vanity. Of course, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish a work worth doing from a work worth avoiding. Lord Krishna says in Verse 16 of Chapter 4 of the Geeta, "*kiṁ karma kim akarmeti kavayo 'pyatra mohitāḥ*" (Maharaj 108).

So, after finding out the right thing to do we must concentrate on it. For success we must have a single goal at a time, and proceed with sincerely, diligence and determination. For the accomplishment of a work in perfection we must have resolute will and unblemished mind. In Lord Krishna words, "*vyavasāyātmikā buddhir ekeha*" (Kapoor 94). We must have sterling faith in our work, in the law of Nature, faith in our abilities to do the work and faith in God, the overseeing power. Let this faith serve as the rock to stay on. With determination and affirmatory will we are sure to rise step by step. On the contrary, the mind of a person with non-determinative will is scattered in so many directions with multiple goals at one time, "*bahuśākhā hyanantāśca buddhayo'vyavasāyīnām*". It is necessary, therefore, to have first-hand knowledge of a good work, adverse work and a work worth refraining from. So advises Lord Krishna, the promoter of the doctrine of Karma from Verse 17 of chapter 4 in the Gita, "*karmaṇo hyapi boddhavyaṁ boddhavyaṁ cha vikarmaṇaḥ akarmaṇaśh cha boddhavyaṁ gahanā karmaṇo gatiḥ*". Let us now conclude, for William Shakespeare says with the help of his creation, character Polonius, in act 2, scene 2 of Hamlet, "Brevity is the soul of wit" (*Hamlet, Act II, Scene 2: Open Source Shakespeare*).

Though our objective is to make our appeal appealing rather than witty. Shrimad Bhagwat says, "*durlabho mānuṣo deho dehinām kṣaṇa-bhaṅguraḥ*". Human body is the rarest of the rare boon of God bestowed upon us. Even celestial bodies aspire for human form on earth. In this unique human form, we have the power to do whatever we wish. By the better execution of our Karma i.e. duty, we can make a better karma i.e. destiny for us. So, keep company with noble minds, as "Binu satsang Bibek na hoyee" - Tulsidas. Stay in communion with your soul and pursue your goal with a disciplined mind, as the Kathopnishad says, "*Uttiṣṭhata jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata*". By doing so you are sure to achieve your goal. A man is loved, praised and honoured for his handsome acts, not for his handsome body, as Geoffrey Chaucer says, - "Handsome is as handsome does".

### III. CONCLUSION

The doctrine of Karma, viewed through a humanitarian lens, stresses responsibility, resilience, and ethical living over fatalism. Across cultures, wisdom echoes that human beings rise and fall by their own deeds. The Gita (BG 2.63) warns that anger clouds judgment, while discipline ensures clarity. Perseverance (*Charaiveti Charaiveti*), effort (*Udyamena hi sidhyanti kāryāṇi*), and noble company (*Binu satsang bibek na hoyee*) remain pillars of success. Human life, described as "*durlabho mānuṣo deho*" in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, is a rare chance to shape destiny through righteous action. Thus, Karma stands as a universal ethical principle, guiding individuals to live responsibly and meaningfully.

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